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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 000710

SIPDIS

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DS/IP, AND DS/IP/ITA
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [SU](#) [CD](#)
SUBJECT: SUDAN WARNS OF JEM RAID ON KHARTOUM, ASKS FOR U.S.
HELP

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Classified By: DCM Roberto Powers, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) In a call to CDA Fernandez late on May 8 and during a hastily convened diplomatic corps briefing on May 9, Sudan warned of an advance of JEM rebel forces deep into Sudanese territory, including a possible attack on a suburb of Khartoum within days. The Government also made a public statement to this effect, which ran in local papers on May 9. Sudan alleged that Chadian military elements were supporting the offensive and called on the U.S. and the international community to urge Chad to "call off the attack" and to provide information on the rebel advance. JEM representatives denied an advance on Khartoum and dismissed suggestions that the Chadian military is embedded in the movement. Senior Assistant to the President Minni Minawi denied rumors that he is both colluding with the insurgents and had resigned from the Government, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed Minawi's assertions. End summary.

MFA: JEM Incursion Underway

¶2. (C) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Mutriff Siddiq telephoned CDA Fernandez late on May 8 to report that an incursion of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) deep into Sudan may be underway. Siddiq had just returned to Khartoum International Airport from the Sudan Consortium in Oslo, Norway. An "all Zaghawa force" composed of JEM and Chadian military personnel may attack the Khartoum suburb of Omdurman within days, he warned. Mutriff requested USG assistance to "identify this force so that innocent civilians are not targeted by mistake" and noted that such an audacious JEM attack deep inside Sudan would be a disaster.

Sudan Briefs Diplomatic Corps

¶3. (SBU) MFA U/S Siddiq then convoked the diplomatic corps the morning of May 9 to inform them of these developments "in view of the urgency of the situation." He said that the GOS has been following information "for more than a month" that JEM has been planning an attack on targets deep in Sudanese "national territory." He said the GOS received information that a large group of forces crossed into Sudan "from the

neighboring country" (clearly implying Chad) about one week ago. These forces combined with JEM forces and, led by JEM chairman Khalil Ibrahim in four groups, advanced through North Darfur into Northern Kordofan and on May 8 had arrived within 200 kilometers of Omdurman. Siddiq said the total force of approximately 3000 soldiers had "assembled again" in search of water and shelter and then dispersed along the mountains in Northern Kordofan due to their concerns about attacks from the Sudanese Air Force.

¶4. (SBU) Siddiq was vague in identifying specific locations where he claimed the forces are now "dispersed," but said the rebel forces might attack targets anywhere along the sandy plain from Merowe or Dongola in the North, to Omdurman alongside the national capital, all the way south to Al Obeid or Al Nahud in Kordofan. (Note: This is a lengthy swath of territory running 750 kilometers North to South. Siddiq noted that given the flat sandy plains the rebel vehicles could cover at least 50 kilometers or more per hour. UNAMID sources in El Fasher posited on May 9 that JEM forces are likely concentrating in Kordofan rather than in Northern Sudan near Merowe. End note.)

¶5. (SBU) Siddiq said the force is entirely Zaghawa led by JEM and is supported with troops comprised of "his brothers from the neighboring country." He said the force is well armed with artillery and vehicles. Siddiq said that Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) chairman and Senior Assistant to the President Minni Minawi is not involved in this attack and that in fact Minawi had been helpful, providing some useful information to the GNU. Siddiq said that all of the forces in the GNU had pledged their support, including GNU First Vice President Salva Kiir, "who offered to send his forces to defend the country if necessary."

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Sudan Asks for International Support

¶6. (SBU) Siddiq said the GNU does not want to alarm civilians more than necessary, "however they will soon know about these events when they see the mobilization of military forces in these areas as a response." Siddiq called on "our friends in the international community" to call on "the neighboring country (Chad) and these forces to call off the attack" in the interests of protecting the lives of innocent civilians. Siddiq said the Sudanese Air Force is not in a position to attack the rebels now, since they are "dispersed in villages and towns and we do not want to hurt any civilians." However, Siddiq said that the SAF will attack the rebels when they are "exposed in the open areas on the plains." He noted that Sudan is a developing country with limited technical capacity and therefore does not have the ability to conduct air operations against the rebels at night, if they do mount an overnight attack. Ominously, Siddiq threatened that "if the rebels are not deterred by their friends, we will have to deal with them, and we will try to minimize civilian casualties." Siddiq vowed that "we hope this will be the end of the story of Khalil Ibrahim."

¶7. (SBU) Siddiq warned that although the rebels had not yet attacked any garrisons or civilian targets, once the rebels are defeated and turn back toward Darfur they are "likely to attack some locations in desperation" in search of vehicles and fuel. Siddiq promised that for now the GNU will continue to secure humanitarian convoys to ensure supplies to "the needy people of Darfur," but regretted that "we may have to stop them if necessary and we will coordinate with WFP."

¶8. (SBU) In an apparent dig against the UN forces in Sudan, Siddiq said that the GNU had tried to coordinate with UNAMID Joint Special Representative Rodolphe Adada "but we could not find him." Siddiq said the GNU had also tried to coordinate with UNMIS but that SRSG Ashraf Qazi traveled directly from

the Sudan Consortium meetings in Oslo to New York. Therefore, Siddiq said the GNU had communicated directly with the office of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to inform him of these events. Siddiq noted that the GNU was also able to reach someone from the local office of the African Union (AU), who was present at the diplomatic corps briefing.

JEM Denies Reports

¶9. (C) In conversations with Poloff and Fieldpoloff on May 9, JEM's former Cease-fire representative in El Fasher and the JEM representative in N'djamena dismissed suggestions of a JEM advance. They characterized as "ridiculous" reports that Chadian military elements are embedded with JEM forces and said it was unlikely that JEM had reached within 100km of Khartoum. The representative in N'djamena did, however, ominously note that "in Sudan, anything is possible."

Minawi: Not Involved in JEM Advance

¶10. (C) In a phone conversation with Poloff on May 9, Minawi denied rumors that he is involved and confirmed that he remains in the Government of National Unity (GNU). Minawi said that he was monitoring a JEM/Chadian military advance across the Chadian border into North Darfur earlier this week but had then lost track of the column. Minawi said that the Minister of Presidential Affairs Bakri Hassan Saleh spoke to him at approximately 0100 local time on May 9 to report that JEM forces, reinforced by elements from the Chadian military, were 190 km from Omdurman. Minawi, who was at a wedding in Omdurman at the time, returned to his residence in Khartoum.

¶11. (C) Fearing reprisals against the Zaghawa in Khartoum (both Minawi's SLM and the majority of JEM partisans hail from the Zaghawa tribe), Minawi called his senior lieutenants to converge on his residence. He was later informed that the security services had arrested at least 20 SLM members in Omdurman. He protested these reprisals to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement's (SPLM) deputy in the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) on the morning of May 9, who also confirmed that JEM forces were advancing on Khartoum. Later on May 9, Minister of Livestock and

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Fisheries Mohammed Ahme Altahir Abu Kalabish--a Kordofan native and former member of Jaffar Nimeiri's inner circle with ties to the National Congress Party (NCP)--told Minawi that the NCP is seeking to paint him as a co-conspirator with JEM.

PCP: NCP Scheme on Security Law

¶12. (C) Popular Congress Party (PCP) Secretary General Bashir Adam Rahma told Poloff on May 9 that the PCP, which is led by former regime founding father Hassan Al Turabi and has long been rumored to have strong ties to JEM, is unaware of any advance on Khartoum. He postulated that the NCP may have concocted the incident to prejudice an ongoing debate in the National Assembly to strengthen the internal security law in favor of NISS.

Comment

¶13. (C) The GNU's purpose in convening the diplomatic community and making a public statement about the alleged JEM attack appears aimed at spotlighting JEM's intentions to attack targets outside of Darfur, as well as publicly justifying the regime's intentions to hit back hard against

JEM. Siddiq's comments that "we hope that this will be the end of the story of Khalil Ibrahim" is telling, though in reality the regime has demonstrated a limited ability to cause any serious damage to JEM. Given our information from limited JEM sources and the CFC, it appears that JEM is indeed on the move and may well have sent forces into Kordofan--and it is worth noting that JEM has attacked targets including oil installations in Kordofan on at least two occasions over the last six months. However, whether this is indeed a large-scale force of 3000 troops directly reinforced by Chadian troops as claimed by the GNU remains to be seen. The GNU has been anxious about JEM plans for several weeks, telling us on several occasions that they have information of impending JEM attacks, and JEM itself warned of an expansion of its military campaign outside Darfur if the GNU did not respond to its request over two months ago for direct negotiations. Over the next few days Post will continue to gather information and update the Department on developments. Post is convening an EAC meeting May 9 (septel) to determine whether any specific actions are required. End comment.

¶14. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
FERNANDEZ